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SUBJECT: DAILY SUMMARY OF JAPANESE PRESS 01/29/08

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AMERICAN EMBASSY, TOKYO
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DAILY SUMMARY OF JAPANESE PRESS
January 29, 2008

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ARTICLES:

(1) Four stopgap bills submitted to Diet in past following Lower House dissolutions

MAINICHI (Page 3) (Excerpts)
January 29, 2008

With the aim of temporarily extending the terms of tax-related legislation, the government submitted stopgap bills four times in the past: 1953, 1955, 1967 and 1970. In all cases, the House of Representatives was dissolved either between December and January or in late March, thereby forcing the government to submit stopgap bills as the last resort to secure sufficient time for deliberating on legislation beyond their March 31 expiration. This time, the Lower House was not dissolved. Concerned that the situation might result in a censure motion against the prime minister, (the ruling coalition) has decided to submit a stopgap bill in the form of lawmaker-initiated legislation. It can said to be a rare case under the divided Diet in which the ruling bloc has a majority in the Lower House and the opposition camp controls the House of Councillors.

In 1953, then Prime Minister Shigeru Yoshida dissolved the Lower House on March 14 following the chamber's adoption of a no-confidence motion against him. The government submitted a stopgap

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bill to an Upper House emergency meeting on March 18. The bill was then enacted by the Upper House alone and was later approved by the Lower House after the election in accordance with a constitutional provision.

In 1955, the Lower House was dissolved on Jan. 24. The Diet convened on March 18, and a stopgap bill was submitted to the Diet on March 24 and was adopted on 31.

This time around, there still remain two months before the current fiscal year ends on March 31. This reflects the ruling bloc's aim to secure 60 days for the bill's re-adoption by the Lower House in case Upper House deliberations are prolonged by the opposition camp.

(2) Ruling parties to submit stopgap gasoline rate bill; Rates' expiration in April feared

MAINICHI (Page 3) (Abridged)
January 29, 2008

The ruling bloc has decided to submit to the Diet a stopgap bill extending the term of validity of the provisional tax rate on gasoline for two months without waiting for the full-fledged "gasoline Diet." Once the term expires, gasoline prices will drop 25 yen per liter. Alarmed by the prospect that the public will welcome the rate's expiration, the ruling camp has decided to delay the timeframe to lower prices. The decision also reflects the ruling bloc's intention to buy time with the aim of softening the stance of the main opposition Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ or Minshuto), which is opposed to maintaining the provisional tax rate. The DPJ, which envisages a decisive battle in April following the rate's expiration, is visibly upset.

Afraid of Lower House dissolution

Liberal Democratic Party Secretary General Bunmei Ibuki attended a government-ruling bloc meeting yesterday, in which he underlined the need to submit a stopgap bill, saying, "It is safety net legislation to prevent the economy and people's lives from falling into turmoil." Guiding discussions in the party, Ibuki brushed aside strong reluctance in the party.

The LDP leadership had initially planned to have a bill amending the Special Taxation Measures Law, including a step to extend the provisional tax rates for 10 years, clear the Lower House in mid-February and press the DPJ for the enactment of the bill within the current fiscal year. The provisional tax rates expire on March 31. They figured that even if the legislation was voted down in the Upper House, the rates' expiration can be avoided with the Lower House's re-adoption of the legislation.

But if the DPJ protracts deliberations and the revision bill fails to clear the Diet before March 31, gasoline prices will drop 25 yen per liter starting in April. Even if the Lower House managed to readopt it afterwards, raising the gasoline prices that are closely associated with people's lives back to the previous level would draw a strong public outcry. Also alarmed by possible political turmoil forcing Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda for Lower House dissolution, Ibuki and others have come up with the rare approach of submitting a stopgap bill to get it clear the Lower House before the end of January.

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They opted for the stopgap bill instead of a revision bill, thinking that would help soften the opposition camp's reaction. Before long, the government and ruling parties are scheduled to present the DPJ with the appointment of the new Bank of Japan governor, which requires the Upper House's concurrence. They are also considering settling the matter through talks between Prime Minister Fukuda and DPJ President Ichiro Ozawa. They also have decided that it would be wise to submit the stopgap bill in order to search for common ground with the DPJ regarding the provisional rates' term of validity and their use.

Nevertheless, the makeshift approach just for averting gasoline price cuts might add fuel to public criticism and affect the budget deliberation timetable depending on how the opposition bloc reacts. An LDP executive also complained about double work to enact the stopgap bill and the Special Taxation Measures Law revision bill.

Submitting censure motion difficult

DPJ Diet Affairs Committee Chairman Kenji Yamaoka indicated to reporters that his party would put up do-or-die resistance, saying: "The law's term of validity will soon expire, so (the ruling bloc) is trying to take a deceptive step." Before reporters, DPJ Deputy President Naoto Kan also criticized the ruling parties: "It means the ruling bloc, armed with a two-thirds majority, has ruled out discussions. It has denied the Diet itself." The stopgap bill, however, might derail the DPJ's plan to force the prime minister into dissolving the Lower House for a general election.

The DPJ plans to drive the government and ruling coalition to a tight corner in April when gasoline prices might actually drop. The largest opposition party is eager to link the issue of gasoline prices, which is closely associated with people's lives, to the government's budget bill with the aim of enlisting public support. Gasoline prices will not fall if the stopgap legislation clears the Diet. Additionally, the ruling bloc's decision to submit the makeshift legislation based on its re-adoption in the Lower House indicates the prime minister's intention not to dissolve the Lower House for the time being. In yesterday morning's meeting of opposition party Diet affairs committee chiefs, many pointed out the absence of intention to dissolve the Lower House from the prime minister who does not want to lose a two-thirds majority in the Lower House.

The DPJ can still resort to submitting a censure motion against the prime minister in the Upper House. In the event the stopgap legislation passes through the Diet, the next deadline would be May 31. If the bill amending the Special Taxation Measures Law to extend the provisional tax rates for 10 years is enacted around that time when the July G8 Summit is just around the corner, to what extent the DPJ can put up resistance is unknown. Even if the stopgap legislation is readopted in the Lower House, submitting a censure motion in the Upper House does not seem appropriate.

Blocking the ruling camp's plan to get the stopgap legislation clear the Lower House before the end of this month also seems difficult. The reason is because the DPJ's strategy of boycotting Diet deliberations amid financial woes resulting from plummeting stock prices is expected to draw heavy fire from the public. Diet affairs chief Yamaoka briefed Ozawa on the outlook around yesterday noon, in which the opposition president reportedly said, "I'm tired." Some DPJ members have begun voicing hopes for the Diet chairs and others

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to step in to settle the matter in some fashion.

(3) Editorial: Stopgap gas tax rate bill; Ruling parties should improve Diet deliberations instead of using clever parliamentary tricks

TOKYO SHIMBUN (Page 5) (Full)
January 29, 2008

Isn't it outrageous for the ruling parties to try to submit to the Diet today a stopgap bill extending the provisional gas tax rate as an emergency measure and then have it pass the Lower House? What the people want to see is not a clever parliamentary trick but substantive Diet deliberations.

The ruling camp's submitting a stopgap bill is probably like a writer asking for extension on the deadline for his work. However, no writers would ask for extension even before picking up their pen. It is strange for the ruling parties to try to extend the expiration of the provisional tax rate from the end of March to the end of May, without even deliberating on the details of the tax rate.

In a bid to score points by obtaining a reduction in gasoline prices, the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ or Minshuto), the dominant party in the Upper House, is bound to put up resistance to the gasoline tax bill's passage within the current fiscal year or the stopgap bill amending the Special Tax Measures Law in order to keep the provisional tax rate beyond April. Delay in the passage of the bill could disrupt people's lives with the central and local governments suffering tax-revenue shortfalls.

Provided the revised bill passes the Lower House this month, it would be possible for the ruling camp, using a 60-day rule if the DPJ stalls on the roll call in the Upper House, to pass it by a second vote in the Lower House and put it into effect before the end of the current fiscal year. However, since it is impossible for the bill to clear the Lower House by the end of January, there not being enough time, the ruling camp aims at passing the original bill without fail, after securing Diet approval for the stopgap bill extending the expiration of the provisional tax rate.

With the victory of a ruling-camp-backed candidate in the much spotlighted Osaka gubernatorial election, the ruling parties immediately moved ahead and submitted the stopgap bill in one sweep. In actuality, however, the Osaka candidate's name recognition greatly contributed to his victory. The ruling camp should be aware that the election outcome does not mean that they have regained popular support.

The opposition parties are fiercely resisting the ruling parties' move, arguing that they are using their numbers to control the Diet, and are acting without regard to the public. A planned meeting among secretaries general of the ruling and opposition parties fell

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through. The DPJ is determined to resort to even physical resistance if the ruling camp rams the bill through the Lower House. There are indications of major turmoil coming.

We do not want to see stormy sessions in the Diet, given that the opposition now controls the Upper House and the ruling camp controls the Lower House. We want Diet members to focus on problems so far overlooked, using the current situation as a good opportunity for discussions that take the public's perspective in mind. The

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special-purpose road construction revenue issue is indeed symbolic in that sense.

Is it really necessary to spend 59 trillion yen for projects under a 10-year road building plan? Why do the ruling parties want to extend the provisional tax rate for another 10 years? Both the ruling and opposition parties are responsible for coming up with convincing answers to such questions. The New Komeito has proposed setting up an advisory body on the road issue. If panel members openly deliberate issues in the Diet, it would be worth listening to the debates.

As Tokyo Shimbun pointed out when the ruling camp adopted the new refueling legislation, they should be cautious about exercising their right to put a bill to a second vote in the Lower House. This is especially true this time, because they will likely have to exercise the right twice. The DPJ would not be able to gain the public's understanding either, if it delays Diet deliberations on the bill in a manner that makes resorting to such a resolution a foregone conclusion. There are two months to go until the end of March. It is too soon for them to opt for clever tricks.

(4) Editorial: Stopgap bill cannot resolve issue

MAINICHI (Page 5) (Full)
January 29, 2008

Are the government and ruling parties trying to seriously enact an ad hoc bill? There are serious questions about their approach.

The law that stipulates the current provisional rates for gasoline and other road-related taxes will expire at the end of March. The government has already submitted to the Diet a bill extending by 10 years the provisional tax rates. However, there is no hope that the legislation will clear the Diet before the end of March due to opposition by the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ or Minshuto).

Therefore, the Liberal Democratic Party-New Komeito ruling coalition plans to present a stopgap bill initiated by lawmakers to put off the deadlines for the provisional tax rates for two months, and get the bill through the House of Representatives before the end of January. Even if the DPJ drags out taking a vote on after the bill is sent to the House of Councillors, the ruling coalition will be able to enact it before the end of March by resorting to the so-called 60-day rule, which allows for a bill to be sent back to the Lower House if the bill has not been voted on within 60 days after being presented to the upper chamber.

The ruling camp's plan is that if this approach is taken, it will be possible to prevent the provisional tax rates from becoming temporarily null and void even if the enactment of the 10-year extension bill is delayed to April or later.

It was known that when the law would expire and the DPJ would strongly oppose the law's extension. That's why Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda said in his policy speech that the ruling and opposition camps should discuss well based on the relationship of trust.

The ruling coalition's way of submitting a stopgap bill at the time when deliberations on the bill to maintain the provisional tax rates for ten years have yet to start, ignoring Fukuda's suggestion, can be called "an outlandish scheme." The outlandish measure can be

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effective temporarily, but it creates a problem without fail. What came to light from a series of moves is the persistence of the government and ruling parties that they never give up on the revenues for road construction coming from the provisional tax rates.

In contrast to its slogan that unnecessary roads would not be built, the Koizumi cabinet's reform of Japan Highway Public Corp. ended as a half-baked reform. Even though, the Koizumi government's policy goal of shifting the revenues for road construction to the general

budget was taken over by the Abe cabinet.

However, the road maintenance and improvement plan compiled last December by the Fukuda cabinet incorporated a policy of putting the revenues into road projects for 10 years from fiscal 2008. It is obvious that the Fukuda government has retreated from the reform stance assumed by the two former cabinets.

Based on a deep repentance for its crushing defeat in the Upper House election last summer, the LDP's real intention is probably to support construction firms in rural areas through road projects. Since the party cannot speak about it boldly, Prime Minister Fukuda and other officials have stated that the provisional tax rates constrain gasoline consumption and that it is an environmentally friendly tax system.

If the LDP asserts that abolition of the provisional tax rates goes against anti-global warming efforts, it should ask the opposition camp to hold policy consultations on a plan to set up an environment tax. It should not switch and justify its argument.

The DPJ is also responsible for creating circumstances to allow the ruling coalition to come up with the stopgap bill. The reason is that it is crystal clear that the DPJ is trying to force the Prime Minister to dissolve the Lower House for a snap election by setting a cut in gasoline prices as its goal.

Gasoline sales and distribution should not be disrupted for the sake of Lower House dissolution. The government and ruling coalition should find tenaciously some common ground between the ruling and opposition camps, and not rely on a clever tricks.

(5) Otaru City says it will be difficult to accept USS Blue Ridge's port call next month

ASAHI (Hokkaido edition) (Page 27) (Full)
January 29, 2008

The United States Navy has requested a port call Feb. 7-11 by the Blue Ridge, the command ship of the Seventh Fleet home-ported at Yokosuka Naval Base. In response to the request, the port manager of Otaru City yesterday revealed that he had just told the harbor master of Otaru (director general of the Otaru Regional Coast Guard Department) to avoid having the vessel pay a port call on the grounds that it would be difficult to prepare a quay because every quay the USS would come alongside is scheduled to be used by commercial vessels for loading or unloading. Reportedly, the city for the first time has answered that it would be difficult to meet the U.S. Navy's request for the port call.

According to the U.S. Forces Japan's (USFJ) port-call request made to the Japan Coast Guard, it was hoped that the ship could berth in

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a quay from Feb. 7, 10:00 a.m. through Feb. 11, 10:00 a.m. The purpose of the port call reportedly is to make a goodwill and friendship visit.

Norio Yamazaki, director of the city government's General Affairs Department, explained at a press conference that the port would be crowded by commercial vessels. The city official said: "The places for USS (Blue Ridge) to berth in the port are limited to four because of water depth. Large vessels are scheduled to arrive around then. So, there is no available space. The proposed port call would cause trouble."

(6) Otaru City turns down U.S. Navy's request on its ship's port call

AKAHATA (Page 15) (Full)
January 29, 2008

Hokkaido's Otaru City (headed by Mayor Katsumaro Yamada) yesterday declared that it would turn down a request made by the United States Navy to have the Seventh Fleet's command ship, USS Blue Ridge, make a port call at the city.

The city government said that it would be difficult to prepare a quay for the Blue Ridge because any quay the ship would come alongside is scheduled to be in use by commercial vessels or for loading and unloading. Otaru Port has four quays that the Blue Ridge can come alongside, but those quays are solely for cargo or container vessels.

According to a classified document that the Ryukyu Shimpo obtained regarding the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) related to the Japan-U.S. military alliance, Otaru Port and Muroran Port (in Muroran City, Hokkaido) are named as preferred ports for the U.S. Navy. Every year, U.S. Navy ships call at those ports.

Blue Ridge is scheduled to make a port call on Feb. 7-11, while Seventh Fleets' Aegis ship John S. McCain is planned to arrive at Ishikari Bay New Port around the same time.

Yutaka Saito, chief of the Secretariat of the Otaru Federation of Workers Unions, said: "I think the city government, apparently influenced by our continued refusal to let warships' port calls at a commercial and peace port,' as well as our continued protests, would have made such a decision. I'll let this be known to the public."

Otaru City Assembly member Yoshinori Kitano, who belongs to the Japanese Communist Party, commented: "Commercial use is cited as the reason to turn down the request, but I think this decision could be essentially taken as rejecting U.S. warships' port calls. We will urge the city government, which has described itself as a peace city aiming to eliminate nuclear weapons across the world, to definitely reject a port call by any warship."

(7) Editorial: Prime Minister Fukuda's speech in Davos fails to inspire

TOKYO SHIMBUN (Page 5) (Full)
January 29, 2008

Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda at an annual meeting of the World Economic Forum (Davos Conference) released a greenhouse gas

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emissions reduction initiative, including the setting up of country-by-country aggregate emissions goals. The statement was well prepared and polished. However, the point is to whom his speech gave consideration.

He said, "In order to turn Japan into a low-carbon-consuming society, I have decided to fundamentally revise all of our systems, including the production mechanism, lifestyle and the desired forms of cities and the traffic system." We want to give high marks to his enthusiasm.

He also categorically declared, "Japan along with other major greenhouse gas emitters will address a reduction in such gases, by setting country-by-country aggregate reduction goals."

However, the specifics of his proposal are vague.

The prime minister said that such goals should be set, based on a sector-by-sector buildup method.

This is a method of each country settling a goal, by estimating the amounts of reductions each sector, such as household, industry, electric power or steel, can achieve, while taking into account progress of energy-conserving technologies, and setting the aggregate amount as its target.

It is certainly a realistic proposal which each country would find it easy to take part. However, would it be possible to attain the absolute goal of rescuing human beings from the crisis of global warming with a "do-as-much-as-we-can" stance? As the prime minister himself stressed in his speech, there is now an urgent need to deal with climate change.

The prime minister also stated that the base year for greenhouse gas

emissions cuts as stipulated in the Kyoto Protocol should be revised. His statement indicates his consideration to domestic business circles, which claim that setting 1990 as a target year, by which time Japan had fully developed energy-conserving measures, is disadvantageous for it.

The world would not be inspired by such a proposal that reflects a stance of giving priority to his own country's interests.

To begin with, the agreement reached by the Ad Hoc Working Group on Further Commitments for Annex 1 Parties late last year at the COP13/CMP3 in Bali categorically mentions that the point the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) made that it is necessary to reduce greenhouse gas emissions 40 PERCENT -40 PERCENT by 2020, compared with the 1990 levels.

This figure is now the basic assumption in the world. The U.S. is opposing the proposal just for the sake of securing its own benefits, knowing that it goes against the trend. The world would not like the statement, which stepped back from the Kyoto Protocol with the prime minister himself denying the pact.

In order for the prime minister to display leadership at the Lake Toya Summit in Hokkaido, he should go further and clarify a specific goal to be achieved by Japan in compliance with the IPCC's proposal.

Business circles should also regain the spirit that they had

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displayed when they tided over the oil crises 35 years ago. Otherwise, their distance from the world and the "earth" will become even widen.

(8) Outlook for 2008-Cutting the world

SANKEI (Page 12&13) (Full)
January 24, 2008

Okamoto: Japan must see the historical turning point
Sato: Is "Japan passing" acceptable?

The year 2008 has set in with crude oil prices soaring and stock markets plunging worldwide. The world in 2008 looks stormy from the very outset. The Sankei Shimbun presents the first round of dialogues between Yukio Okamoto, a consultant on international affairs and former Foreign Ministry official, and Masaru Sato, a writer and a Foreign Ministry official currently suspended and under indictment. How will this year turn out for the world and Japan? Okamoto underscores the "historical turning point" of this year, while Sato points to "the importance of ideas." Both Okamoto and Sato stressed the need for Japan to ready itself for global changes. (Moderator: Akio Takahata, a senior editorial writer for the Sankei Shimbun)

-- Last year, there were major events in Japan and in the world. This year as well, we will see big changes, such as the U.S. and Russian presidential elections. How do you think this year will turn out in the world?

Sato: This is rough thinking, but there's something I can say about both 2007 and 2008. I think that there is a growing fear of a third world war, unlike past years. I don't mean at all to fan the flames of war, but there is already a war on terror going on following the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on America. This war is asymmetrical. This kind of war is one trend. Another trend is the outbreak of regional conflicts, as we have seen in the past years. I don't know what would happen if these two trends somehow linked together. The Middle East especially is like a big volcano ready to blow. However, I think we can expect to see incidents of Islamic terrorism in Pakistan, as well as in the Balkans, including Kosovo, Albania, and Bosnia. So we must change our way of thinking, or we will not be able to see the threat coming. This is the situation I see developing. This is my first point. Secondly, I feel that thought is very important. Islamic fundamentalism is a kind of thought. So is China's view of scientific growth. Putin is exploring

ethnicity as a principle in order to rebuild Eurasiasm. Neocon (neoconservatism or neoconservatives) in America is also represent a kind of thought or set of ideas.

Okamoto: You said thought has become very important. That's interesting. I agree. Neo-conservatism today stems from Podhoretz, Kristol, and other socialists close to being Trotskyites. They all turned rightists. Converts turn radical. However, the role of the American neo-conservatism is over.

Sato: But the neoconservatives have settled down and are now taking interesting positions. They are stressing their sense of values in their respective positions. They are melding together their neo-conservatism with a kind of realism to reshape it.

At any rate, ideas remain important. North Korea has strongly set

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forth its military-first thinking. Japan is the only country without thought. What's more, Japan cannot seem to tell what's wrong, so it cannot see a crisis even if it arises before its eyes. That's strange, I think. Although America is thinking of global stability and peace in its global strategy, it only serves to make other countries become increasingly irritated at it. They would like to express their irritation with the U.S. in words, but they just cannot. The United States also cannot seem to grasp well how irritated other countries are with it. I don't see a bright picture. I think this year will be very difficult.

Okamoto: In 1993, after the Soviet Union collapsed, I attended a seminar in the United States. There were many prominent people at that meeting. I remember that everyone at the forum was saying we were at the biggest turning point in 300 years. They said something like this. Humanism was established with the Renaissance. After that, industrial society came into being. And then, a bourgeois revolution took place. Over the next 300 years, an international system was established, mainly composed of nation states. Now, we're again at the beginning of another 300 year timespan. This is what they said. In the next 300 years, sovereign states would not be the only players in international politics, including individuals, international organizations, regional communities, and business entities. This is what they had in mind.

-- 300 years is a long time, isn't it?

Okamoto: I don't know if everyone there was thinking like that. However, what they said was proved by the terrorist attacks on 9-11. It was ironic, though. They said that non-state players might shock the world like this. Of course, I don't think the war on terror will continue as long as 300 years. They forecasted that individuals would become major players during the next 300 years. This does not necessarily mean that the war on terror will continue over the next 300 years. However, the frameworks and groupings of sovereign states now regulate international politics. But we will probably have to change this system to a considerable extent, I think. That's one point. One other point is the emergence of the BRICs (short for Brazil, Russia, India, and China as newly emerging countries). However, Russia must not be put on the same plane as the other newly emerging countries. Russia is advanced both in its civilization and its science and technology. That's why. However, the BRICs countries, including Russia, have made a huge economic impact.

Sato: You're right.

Okamoto: China's per capita GDP is now at the same level as Japan's per capita GDP in 1970. The Tokyo that I knew in 1970 is not so different from now, with some exceptions. In those days, Japan was well off. This means that China today is already 11 times larger than Japan was in those days. It is huge. Japan's GDP is about 61 times larger in nominal terms from 50 years ago as of 2006. When we factor in yen appreciation and inflation, it's 11 times larger in real terms. So China is outpacing Japan in those days. What will it be like in the future? For example, China's GDP in real terms will be five times Japan's some day, I think. The population of 1.3 billion times five-this at least means that there will be an economic population of 6.5 billion suddenly. How many people can

live on the earth? When we say it's 10 billion or 12 billion at the most, China alone accounts for more than 6 billion in terms of economic population or the potentiality of consuming natural resources.

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-- What a day...

Okamoto: Currently, India's population is 1.1 billion. The population of that country will increase to 1.8 billion by 2050. The earth cannot provide for that many people. Then, the question is what we should do. That's already clear, I think. It's to make serious progress in solving our environmental problems. The third point is that America has now stumbled to a considerable extent. When we see opinion polls, the number of countries that dislike America is overwhelming (as compared with the number of pro-U.S. countries).

Sato: The United States has become something like the Roman Empire.

Okamoto: That's right. In Europe, Italy is the only country that likes America much better, when compared with China. In Asia, Japan is the only country that says things like that. If the United States keeps losing its credibility, then we may well wonder what Japan will do.

-- Japan is saddled with heavy homework, isn't it?

Okamoto: Japan has been pulling back. Though it was just for a while, Japan pulled out of the Indian Ocean (i.e., the Maritime Self-Defense Force's refueling mission). Today, Japan's staffing for the United Nations' peacekeeping operations (PKO) numbers only 51 persons--centering on the Golan Heights. However, China has 1,810 persons carrying out PKO. China already has 35 times more people than Japan carrying out PKO contributions. The way things are going, the world will say, "Goodbye, Japan. Hello, China."

Sato: Moreover, Japan has its own logic that only makes sense to us Japanese. In the international community, Japan tries to develop its own logic. The world is even simpler in its logic: Japan is no longer in the Indian Ocean. In Afghanistan, Taliban is coming back. Osama bin Laden also keeps showing up. Syria is being increasingly suspected of developing nuclear weapons. The world asks, "Japan pulled out when things got dangerous, but why?" The world is asking Japan to give an easy-to-understand explanation. However, Japan is only saying, "Well, it was for domestic reasons; it was because of confrontation between the ruling and opposition parties." The world would then say, "All right. Japan has no sense of crisis." They would also ask, "Will things always become a political issue in Japan?" But the former prime minister said he would stake his political life. "What the hell! What do Japanese politicians mean when they say something?" Such questions would come out. One of the cabinet ministers even went so far as to say, "A friend of my friend is an Al Qaeda member." That sounds like a great mystery of the Orient.

Okamoto: Ha ha ha! People overseas may think that a friend of an Al Qaeda member's friend is Japan's justice minister. That's incredible.

Sato: But he is not being blamed for his words by the international community. There's such a reality. That's scary, isn't it?

Okamoto: He's not blamed because he's become a laughingstock.

Sato: That means they don't think Japan is an international player. Two foreign friends told me that they are reading Ruth Benedict's

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work, *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword*. They said, "Japan is a great mystery of the Orient. That's why." I got mad. So I asked, "What's so exotic about Japan?" They said, "It's Japan's wholehearted devotion to something." The Japanese people's devotion to something

is like an exponential power in math. Whatever the base figure is, they don't care about it. Japan will work hard on a task given. Japan does not have fundamental values or ethics, and Japanese think they have only to work harder and harder. That's the only process Japan has. That's why they say, "Japanese work harder and harder until they succeed, and that's scary."

-- Do they mean we have no philosophy or values and we have only a process?

Sato: Yes. I hate to admit it. But Ruth Benedict is again walking tall. That's a book that analyzed Japan as an enemy, so we have to argue back in an effective way. It all overlaps with Okinawa issues, the abductions, and the northern territories. Japan develops a logic that is incomprehensible to the international community. Even so, Japan will get angry when Japan thinks it was insulted. At the personal level, "monster parents" will unreasonably pressure their children's schools to let their kids get full marks. They are only thinking about themselves. This country's national identity is now shrinking. That's the way Japan is, and the question is how to turn Japan around.

Okamoto: A half century before The Chrysanthemum and the Sword was out, Edward Morse wrote Japan Day by Day. In that book, Morse praised the Japanese people. That's basically because of their sincerity. But Morse was overwhelmed by the Japanese public's noble sense of values. Beauty is in the eye of the beholder.

This is the first of a two-section article.

9) Japan on defensive over whaling

ASAHI (Page 2) (Full)
January 29, 2008

Japan's research whaling operations in the Southern Sea are attracting world media attention. Environmental-protection groups have shown actual footage of their protest activities against Japan's whaling ships in media reports and on the Internet, as a strategy to expand public opinion against whaling in the international community. Meanwhile, the Japanese government is stepping up efforts to counter acts of sabotage with explanations in English, but it remains at odds with anti-whaling countries that specify the whale is a mammal that must be protected.

Protest ships send message to international community

"We saved 1200 whales." On Jan. 27, a senior member of the environment-protection group Greenpeace, which had been chasing by boat the Japanese research whaling ship Nisshin Maru, claimed victory to a New Zealand media company. Although the Greenpeace gave up the pursuit because the boat was running out of fuel, the group judged that their activity produced positive results.

Two members of Sea Shepherd (SS) briefly boarded the research whaling ship Yushin Maru No.2 from its protest boat. The boat is still chasing the Japanese ship. SS Captain Paul Watson proudly said in a telephone interview with the Asahi Shimbun: "Not even one whale

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was killed over the past several days owing to our activities. This fact can be cited as our most significant success." Sea Shepherd, which was founded in 1977, is known for its radical activities.

But its media campaign has produced more achievements than those from acts of sabotage. A cameraman and a TV program production member have also been on board the SS boat. Video footage taken there gets sent around the world in an instant via Internet and satellite. Watson said: "We had an interview with a news company of a Latin American nation. We also received e-mails from Japanese citizens saying that they did not know that they (Japanese) have been killing whales."

A senior officer of the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries grumbled: "Radical anti-whaling groups and Western media companies have criticized Japan in chorus, but such cannot be called

international public opinion." The argument that Japan is a bad guy is about to gain influence in the international community. In such a situation, the Fisheries Agency has begun to report on acts of sabotage since the last time and has made it possible to show the footage of scenes of sabotage. In addition, several officers from the Japan Coast Guard have unprecedentedly been on board the research ship, though this has not been publicized.

The Institute of Cetacean Research, which has been engaged in research whaling, has shown on its website pictures of the detained protesters relaxing and enjoying themselves on the ship with explanations both in Japanese and English. The institute was particularly careful so that the two were not referred to as hostages. It has poured more energy into a defensive battle by hiring a foreigner who speaks four languages in preparation for interviews with foreign media companies.

Radical acts criticized even in Australia

Why is the Japanese whaling expedition drawing so much attention? British BBC correspondent Jonah Fisher, who was on a Greenpeace ship, replied by e-mail to the above question by the Asahi Shimbun: "Japan's decision to also catch the humpback whale, the most popular whale specie, made its whaling operations an international political issue."

Australia, which has taken the lead in opposing whaling, used to hunt whales for their oil and bones since the late 18th century. But the whaling industry declined due to the proliferation of alternative products and a decrease in the number of whales as a result of overhunting. In 1979, the Australian government stopped whaling, and instead whale watching tours and cruises have been planned. Such tours are now chief attractions in tourism in Australia. According to the government's tourism bureau, whale watching tours attract 1.6 million tourists every year, with the scale of the market swelling to 300 million Australian dollars, or about 28 billion yen. Among various species of whales, many tourists particularly love the humpback whale, so they fiercely react to Japan (for its whaling operations).

But even in Australia, there are many critics of the radical acts of sabotage by such groups as Sea Shepherd. The Australian newspaper Sydney Morning Herald carried a contributed letter saying: "It is unfortunate to bash Japan over the whaling issue." Charlotte Epstein, professor at the University of Sydney, commented: "(The activities by Sea Shepherd) have adversely affected moves by other

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environment-protection groups that are legally calling for suspending whaling. Such activities are incurring reactions from Japanese people, resulting in complicating the issue."

Dialogues between pro-whalers and anti-whalers have also been launched. The Pew Charitable Trusts, a research institute of the U.S., will hold a Tokyo whaling symposium on Jan. 30-31 at United Nations University in Tokyo. About 90 representatives from the governments, NGO, and research institutes of 28 countries, including Japan, will exchange personal views. A senior policy advisor of the institute said: "It is necessary to construct a relationship of trust and deepen mutual understanding."

SCHIEFFER